

A Spirituality Framework for Peers

Rev. Deven Hazelwood Johnson

MDiv., CPRS

About Me

- Peer Wellness Coach with Frontier Health
- Ordained Pastor in Presbyterian Church (USA)
- Mental Health
- Trained as a Chaplain at Mountain Home VA
- Originally from Cincinnati, OH
- Middle child
- Grew up in conservative independent Christian Churches, attended Christian college & Seminary

Why is this important?

- My background informs my presentation
- My experience with church has been all over the map
- My journey has been unexpected
- I have privilege in some areas of my life, and in other areas I have experienced sexism.

Workshop Goals/Objectives

- Defining Spirituality and Religion
- TN Religious Landscape
- A Spirituality Framework
- Using a Trauma-informed approach
- Recognizing positive and negatives in spiritual practices

Spirituality is as DIVERSE AS RECOVERY

If each of us were to create a paper airplane– they would all be unique. We have the same result– a paper airplane, some of us may even create identical ‘looking’ planes, but we’ve folded it differently, in a different order.



Spirituality is diverse

- The same is true for how we live our spirituality or religion.
- We may believe similar things (or completely different).
- Our journeys, however, are all different, even if we've arrived at the same conclusion.
- Sometimes, the journey is quite similar, and the conclusion is different.

Spirituality vs. Religion

Spirituality can be defined as “the search for the sacred”.

Whereas religion is “the search for significance that occurs within the context of established institutions that are designed to facilitate spirituality”.¹

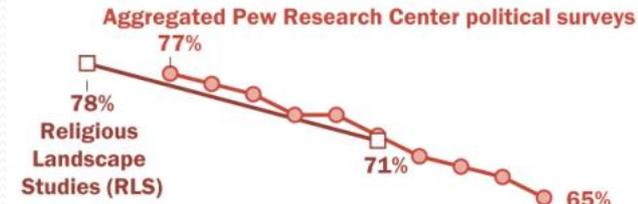
Oxhandler, Holly K. “Namaste Theory: A Quantitative Grounded Theory of Religion and Spirituality in Mental Health Treatment”. *Religions* 2017 , 8, 168, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8090168>.

Why is it necessary to use
“spirituality” over
religion?

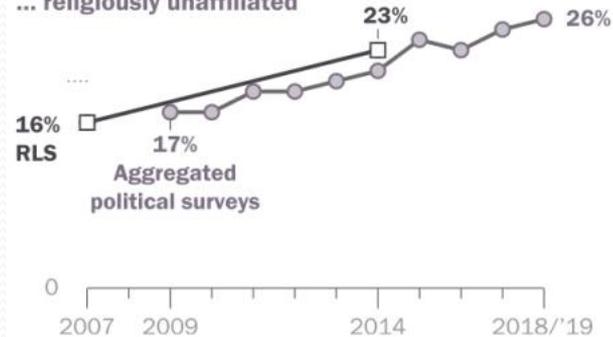
In U.S., smaller share of adults identify as Christians, while religious 'nones' have grown

% of U.S. adults who identify as ...

... Christian



... religiously unaffiliated



Source: Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Studies (2007 and 2014). Aggregated Pew Research Center political surveys conducted 2009-July 2019 on the telephone.

"In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Religious composition of adults in Tennessee

Christian 81%

- Evangelical Protestant 52%
- Mainline Protestant 13%
- Historically Black Protestant 8%
- Catholic 6%
- Mormon 1%
- Orthodox Christian < 1%
- Jehovah's Witness 1%
- Other Christian < 1%

Non-Christian Faiths 3%

- Jewish 1%
- Muslim 1%
- Buddhist 1%
- Hindu < 1%
- Other World Religions < 1%
- Other Faiths 1%

Unitarians and other liberal faiths in the "Other Faiths" Tradition 1%

- Unitarian < 1%
- Humanist < 1%
- Deist < 1%
- Spiritual but not religious < 1%
- Eclectic, a bit of everything, "I have my own beliefs" < 1%
- Other in the "Unitarian and other liberal faiths" family < 1%

New Age < 1%

- Pagan or Wiccan < 1%
- Other in the New Age family < 1%

Native American Religions < 1%

Unaffiliated (religious "nones") 14%

- Atheist 1%
- Agnostic 3%
- **Nothing in particular 11%**
 - **Nothing in particular (religion not important) 4%**
 - **Nothing in particular (religion important) 6%**
- Don't know 1%



Pew Research Center

<https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/tennessee/>

Religion, politics, demographics, belief systems, etc.

Spirituality Framework

It's all about connection.



Connection to...

- God

- Ourselves

- Each other

- nature

- Higher power or no god

- How do we exist within the world?

- How are we connected to each other? Or not?

- How do we relate to nature?

Connection to God/god/goddess

- Is there a god or not?
- How does god relate to humans?
- Even within Christianity there are multiple belief systems.
- Is god all-powerful, controlling every decision or move?
- Is god hands off, allowing humans to make their own decisions?
- Can we be sad, angry, respectful, loving, hating towards a divine being?

Why does it matter?

- If god is all-powerful, why do I have?
- If god is hands-off, what did I do?
- Is there 'karma', punishment on earth, after life?

- What are some of the beliefs (or lack of beliefs) about a higher power that directly affect how you live your daily life?

What does it matter?

Power greater than ourselves

12 Steps, some may say “God-Consciousness”

God could be termed as ‘the universe’, the simulation,
are we in Whoville?

We must also be able to acknowledge that those who do
not believe in a divine being still have a spirituality.

Connection to ourselves

- Where do we fit in?
- This part can include discussions on meaning and purpose.
- What does it mean to be human?
- How do I see myself?

Why is this important?

- Belief systems ALWAYS include how we connect to ourselves, but it is usually overlooked.
- To use a Christian perspective, think about “I am a child of God vs. I am a sinner”
- To borrow from a Buddhist perspective, if suffering is a part of life, we might see ourselves differently.
- How do I relate to my body? Or my Soul?
- Do I have the right to exist? (do I feel shame or free)
- How do I show myself love or self-compassion?

Remember to be trauma informed

Trauma can be stored in our bodies.

Trauma can change our neural pathways as we experience it during childhood and even adulthood.

As a result, we may have strong feelings about our own bodies and minds. We may disassociate. We may feel anxiety.

Recognizing how trauma affects our connection to ourselves can be difficult, but healing for some.

www.acesconnection.com

Connection to Others

- How do we live with others? Do we “need” human connection?
- Does our belief system tell us who is in and who is out?
- Us vs. Them
- The Golden Rule is found in many religions around the world- “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”

Connection to others...

- Namaste- Sanskrit word that literally means, “I bow to you”. It is an acknowledgement of one soul to another soul. OR as I’ve heard it... *“The divine light in me sees or recognizes the divine light in you”*.
- Ubuntu philosophy- term that means humanity OR *I am because we are*.
- If we are all connected, what does that mean for how we treat each other, interact with each other, communicate with each other?

Connection to Nature

- Ever heard, “I don’t go to church much, but I like to go fishing”?
- Pantheism- all the forces in the universe are God
- “I find God in nature.”
- In the Old Testament, God speaks in the wind (or is silent), and in a burning bush.
- Mother Earth, harmony with nature, moon phases
- Being in nature may be their spirituality, at its basic, just being where we came from.

Connection to Nature

- “Even a wounded world is feeding us. Even a wounded world holds us, giving us moments of wonder and joy. I choose joy over despair. Not because I have my head in the sand, but because joy is what the earth gives me daily and I must return the gift.” -
- Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*

Trauma-informed Spiritual discussions

- Recognize your experience and your own spirituality
- Recognize that trauma can come from church leaders, theology, family belief systems, and have lasting and life altering effects
- Remind peers that no one is required to share, or use proper 'theological' language
- Are there other ways for acknowledging trauma can be a result of one's religious or spiritual experiences?

Being mindful about spiritual practices...

- Meditation- can be 'mindfulness', mindful meditation, but basic meditation can be difficult for some.
- Yoga- originated in spirituality, but many places we do not utilize the spiritual side.
- Music- can be a trigger, but also can connect someone to varying levels of emotion, discernment, awe
- What are some other practices we use in recovery?

Final Thoughts...

- Spirituality is as diverse as our recovery!
- Being mindful of our experience before we lead a discussion is a must.
- Be honest and open.
- Our spirituality can be a healthy coping mechanism, a way to explain the world, grief, suffering, love, joy, peace, a source of recovery.
- It can also be a source of trauma and we must recognize this.
- Blessed Be, my friends, my peers. Thank you!